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Written Testimony of Christopher Phelps, Program Director  
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Environment Committee

Wednesday, February 9, 2011

Written testimony supporting Raised Senate Bill 832, An Act Concerning The Protection  
Of Inland Wetlands And Watercourses

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, Senator Roraback, Representative Chapin, and  
members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony supporting Senate Bill 832.  
Environment Connecticut is a member-supported non-profit environmental advocacy  
organization. This bill is would help ensure that the water in Connecticut's rivers and  
streams is clean and healthy.

Protecting the vegetation along waterways is necessary in order to ensure that such  
waterways remain as pollution-free as possible. The vegetation near wetlands and  
waterways prevents erosion, filters out dangerous pollution and helps reduce flooding.  
Protecting these areas would be a significant step towards ensuring clean water for all  
communities in Connecticut.

We urge the committee to approve this bill in a form that provides necessary protections  
to Connecticut's waterways similar to those already in effect in other states such as  
Massachusetts. To that end, we offer the following comments and suggestions for  
strengthening the provisions of SB 832:

- The bill's language includes instances of language stating that municipalities "may"  
take action such as "prohibiting the destruction of natural vegetation." We urge  
the committee to replace the word "may" in this instance with "shall" to require  
such protections.
- We urge the committee to improve the language of the bill by making 100 feet the  
*minimum* protective buffer area being regulated not the maximum. However, in  
addition to this strengthening change, it would be appropriate to include limited  
exceptions to the 100 foot minimum protective zone for circumstances such as  
urbanized areas where such a minimum protective buffer zone could be  
impractical. – For comparison's sake, the Massachusetts River Protection Act  
establishes a 200 foot protected riverfront area, but reduces that to 25 feet in

municipalities with a population of more than 90,000 persons or population density of 9,000 people per square mile.

On behalf of Environment Connecticut's statewide membership, I urge the committee to pass SB 832 to protect our state's waters.

Sincerely,

Christopher Phelps  
Program Director  
Environment Connecticut